

After reviewing the CCT Performance Profile with my mentor around instruction for active learning I noticed that my use of technology and resources to strategically support learning was missing from the classroom. I felt that this was an area that I needed to grow and began to focus on the current use of technology in my classroom.

At the end of last year I attended a presentation by a colleague that supported the use of I Pads in the classroom. The presentation noted that for the students who are growing up in the twenty first century technology is part of their life; at a very young age they are familiar with how to use technology and for these young students who have grown up with technology learning for it is a very natural process. I Pads are also an easier piece of technology for preschoolers to use as they operate using a touch screen as opposed to a mouse and keyboard. After attending this presentation I desired to include the use of I Pads in the classroom, however I was brainstorming how to use them effectively to promote learning.

During an initial universal assessment of a sampling of letters I noticed that 13 out of 18 students knew between 0 and three letters. This suggested that as a whole, letter identification was a skill that we needed to focus on more intentionally. During the first weeks of school I noted that 8 out of 18 students could not identify the letter A and 12 out of 18 students did not know the sound the letter A makes. Initially I attempted to introduce the letter A using our alphabet poster and the wooden pieces for Handwriting Without Tears. However, after several weeks of talking about the letter A my students who could not identify the letter A still could not identify the letter A. I decided to take a new approach. Using the I Pad and two different apps I reintroduced the letter A. Using the Alpha Buddies app the letter A was reintroduced by identifying the letter and the

sound that the letter makes, next several different words beginning with the letter A were shown and students were given an opportunity to say the word and hear the sound. We also used the Handwriting Without Tears app Wet, Dry Try, which reinforced how to write the letter A. This app gave students a visual model of how to write the letter A and guided them on where to start their writing. After using the I Pad to introduce the letter A and focusing on it throughout the week I assessed students a second time on their knowledge of the letter A. During this assessment seventeen out of eighteen students were able to recognize and identify the letter A, many more now knew the sound A makes and my two students whose names begin with the letter A were then able to write the letter A. Based on the data that was collected I felt that this was an effective approach for introducing new letters to students and I plan to continue using this method in the future.

During an observation by my administrator I used an identical format to introduce the letter B. During the lesson on the letter B the range of alphabetic awareness among my students became much more apparent. Some students were able to brainstorm words that started with B while others labeled B as the letter A. Based on these observations and a discussion with my administrator I plan to continue using the I Pad and apps to introduce letters however I plan to do so in a small group setting where students will be homogeneously grouped by skill level. In the small groups I can more effectively differentiate the instruction to meet the needs of the students.

Another source of new learning took place over the past school year through our federal review. Last fall a team of federal reviewers came and performed the CLASS observation in each classroom. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is

an observation tool that allows reviewers to focus on effective teaching practices in the classroom by focusing on classroom interactions that promote student learning. During our professional development at the beginning of the school year the results of the CLASS observations were reviewed and it was found that one area that our school as a whole scored lower on was instructional supports, which encompasses critical thinking skills, concept development, language modeling and quality of feedback.

Reflecting on the areas in which we needed improvement I began to focus on concept development. For a number of the children in my classroom they have very limited life experiences and knowledge of the world around them. I decided to plan a variety of multi sensory units to help expand my students' knowledge and development of concepts. The first unit we did was on the moon. I introduced the topic by reading the book Papa Please Get the Moon For Me by Eric Carle. During this initial lesson I observed that the majority of my students did not know that the moon changes shape and size. They also referred to the full moon as a circle moon. Through our unit on the moon we read several books including fictional stories and non fiction stories. Using pictures on the I Pad, a web cam and a non fiction book about the moon students were able to clearly see the different phases of the moon. Using a variety of art materials we also made four different phases of the moon, a crescent moon, a first quarter moon, a gibbous moon and a full moon, and posted them along with a label for each phase on our wall. At the conclusion of the unit we watched a video of Papa Please Get the Moon for Me. By the end of our unit students were frequently referring to the crescent moon using the name crescent moon and the full moon as the full moon. They also knew that the moon changed shape and became smaller and larger. In addition, during recent parent

conferences several parents mentioned that their children were actively and excitedly looking for the moon at night and were referring to the different phases of the moon using the names crescent and full moon. Although students enjoyed reading the different books on the moon the use of technology helped bring the concepts to life by clearly seeing the moon when we are not able to while at school.

On another occasion I was sharing a story about grapefruit while we were eating breakfast one morning. Out of 18 students 2 students knew what a grapefruit was and commented that they were sour. Many of the other students hearing the word grapefruit thought I was referring to grapes. I quickly pulled the I Pad out and found some pictures of grapefruit using Goggle Image. Many of the students were surprised to see the pictures and commented that they looked similar to oranges. The next day we were fortunate to be able to physically hold and observe grapefruit and try grapefruit. Between the experience of trying the grapefruit and the ability of being able to take advantage of a teachable moment by using technology to illustrate the new concept students were able to gather a greater understanding of the world around them. Since this experience grapefruit has come up again during conversations at mealtimes. Now students seem to have a working concept of a grapefruit by recalling that it look like an orange but it is bigger and sour.

One other area of the classroom that I felt needed extra support through the use of technology was the library. Initially students were rarely entering the library and when they did it was generally to play with puppets. Being aware of the importance of early literacy skills and strongly desiring to see my students picking up books and enjoying literature I began to brainstorm with my mentor options for increasing interest in the library. One option that she suggested was to make classroom books based on

experiences in the classroom. The first type of book that I tried was an "all about me" book which included information on each student such as their family, favorite foods, favorite toys, favorite places to play at school, age, letter and favorite color. After making the books for each student using a digital camera, a color printer and a laminator I introduced each student's all about me book during a whole group circle. After the books had been introduced I placed them in a basket in the library. I began to notice that more students were visiting the library and searching out their individual book. I also began to notice that while students would look at books at the end of the day it was generally quiet without any narration, however when reading the all about me books students were beginning to narrate the pages by reading the pictures. I continued to make classroom books using experiences that the children were familiar with, for example after reading the book Brown Bear, Brown Bear we made a classroom version using a digital camera and pictures of the students. Other classroom books that were made using a digital camera to document our experiences and a color printer were our field trip to the farm, the making of pumpkin pancakes, and the making of gingerbread cookies. Again, with the introduction of the classroom books that shared our common experiences students interest in the library increased. More students were entering the library on a daily basis and reading the pictures of the books to retell our experiences. Although I was happy to see more students entering the library and beginning to read our classroom books that were made I also desired an increased interest in the rest of the books of the shelf.

My mentor suggested including a listening center in or near the library where students could listen to books on tape and follow along in their own individual copy of the book. Using a table and chairs, a CD player, headphones and books on CD I was able

to set up a listening center in the classroom. In a large group I modeled how to use a book on CD. Since introducing the listening center I have been able to include a variety of books on CD and the students seem to be enjoying the listening center as many of the students are visiting the center on a daily basis now and sitting and listening to an entire story. For one specific student when he entered school in October on a good day he would sit for a page or two of a story, however now he will listen to the entire book on CD and that interest has transferred over to listening to a story read aloud in a whole group setting as well.

Towards the beginning of the school year I began reflecting on the visual cues that were present in my room to support students' knowledge of classroom rules and routines. I found that I did not have a picture schedule for students to be able to visually process their routine. My mentor suggested using Boardmaker, a software program to create picture communication symbols, to create a picture schedule. Prior to the introduction of the schedule students were frequently asking what would come next and when we would be going outside or having center time. After creating the schedule and continually referring to it students became familiar with it and have started independently acknowledging our schedule and determining when specific events happen. In addition, as changes in the weather and other activities have effected out schedule from time to time we are able to discuss the change as a class and rearrange the picture to reflect the changes in our schedule. Two specific students who previously had a difficult time with slight changes in the schedule have been able to adapt more easily to the changes with fewer behavioral incidents.

Over the past several months I have begun to include different types of technology into the classroom to better support students learning. After attending a presentation centered around the benefits of I Pads and incorporating them into the classroom as well as several trainings and workshops to increase the quality of instructional support in the classroom I began to brainstorm how I could effectively incorporate technology and strategically support students learning.

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I found that by integrating technology into the classroom to support the regular curriculum students were receiving a more rounded education and were gaining a more complete understanding of concepts being taught. As this proved to be an effective approach to teaching and learning, I plan to continue to incorporate technology into the classroom to support students learning across all domains.